Wretched Things (#1)

by Devon Wong

"The colonized subject is a persecuted man who is forever dreaming of becoming the persecutor."

-- Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*

"We simply cannot find ourselves in these creatures. The more we look, the less we know. They are not like us. They do not respond to acts of love or mercy or remorse. It is worse than indifference. It is deep, dead space without reciprocity, recognition, or redemption."

-- Hugh Raffles, *Insectopedia*

CHARACTER DESCRIPTIONS

Impatience
Family/Genus/Species: Pholcidae (Cellar Spider)
Description: Missing two legs due to a past close encounter with a human while traveling the world. She is a relatively large cellar spider, with incredibly long, graceful legs and a slim body. She is always regal and poised.

Bran
Family/Genus/Species: Mus Musculus (House Mouse)
Description: Small for a mouse his age, young-looking, brown fur, relatively large eyes. Very ‘cute’.

The Home-Owners
Family/Genus/Species: Homo Sapiens (Human)
Description: An ‘ideal’ couple. Good-looking, young professionals. The man is Caucasian, the woman is Asian.

Balsamic
Family/Genus/Species: Mus Musculus (House Mouse)
Description: Scars on his face, a chunk missing from one of his ears, and a stubby tail where it was bitten off. He’s a grizzled, middle-age mouse (father of Bran and Raisin).

Olive
Family/Genus/Species: Mus Musculus (House Mouse)
Description: A middle-aged female mouse, well-kept but starting to show her age. Her fur is streaked with white (mother of Bran and Raisin).

Raisin
Family/Genus/Species: Mus Musculus (House Mouse)
Description: She’s a slimmer, younger, female version of Bran.

Penne
Family/Genus/Species: Mus Musculus (House Mouse)
Description: Slim, sleek, pretty. Large and intelligent eyes. Same age as Bran.

Tarragon
Family/Genus/Species: Mus Musculus (House Mouse)
Description: He’s slim, 'tall', elegant, ‘handsome’. He's a charismatic alpha mouse. Same age as Bran.

Gallop/Scuttle
Family/Genus/Species: Lycosidae (Wolf Spider)
Description: She’s larger than any of the other spiders (nearly the size of an open human palm). She has brown hair.

PAGE ONE (5 panels)

<u>Panel One</u>

A spider is running for its life along a hardwood floor. (Let's say it's a domestic house spider, aka Tegenaria Domestica).

CAPTION (IMPATIENCE):

[1] My broodmother once told me of how, when she was but freshly hatched, there was a great upheaval.

[2] On the first day, the world was dismantled.

<u>Panel Two</u>

A tremendous shadow begins to engulf the running spider. It's obviously not going to make it. Poor chap.

CAPTION (IMPATIENCE):

[3] On the second day, it lay bare and empty, haunted by the memory of what it once was.

[4] On the third day, it was built anew. And the genocide began.

<u>Panel Three</u>

A workman's boot has crushed the spider underfoot.

CAPTION (IMPATIENCE):

[5] For a long time, I thought it just a story.

[6] Until it happened again. In my lifetime.

<u>Panel Four</u>

Pull out to reveal that the boot belongs to a man carrying a box through the front entrance of an old Victorian home in some anonymous, likely North American city (in a northern state of the USA, or perhaps in Canada). There's another pair of men behind him maneuvering a large piece of furniture or an appliance (dresser, table, fridge, take your pick) through the doorway. They're all in uniform as part of a moving company.

CAPTION (IMPATIENCE):

[7] And I was forced to flee the place of my birth, to wander the great wasteland that the creature calling itself man had made of the world.

[8] At first, I merely searched for a new home.

Panel Five

Establishing shot: pull out even further to reveal a young couple (THE HOMEOWNERS) holding each other in the mid-ground, watching the movers struggle in the background. In the foreground is a doorframe from which hangs IMPATIENCE in silhouette. (Also, if you can, sneak a cat carrier into the image somewhere among the piles of moving boxes.)

CAPTION (IMPATIENCE):

[9] But I soon found that wherever I went, the story was the same.

MALE HOMEOWNER:

[10] It’s gonna take some fixing up, but it’ll feel like home soon enough.

CAPTION (Impatience):

[11] And so I searched for something else.

[12] Something more.

PAGE TWO (5 panels)

Panel One

Establishing overhead shot of the mouse town in the house's attic, the kind of attic with rafters and wooden ribs filled with fluffy pink insulation. The mice have built their town in a hardwood clearing between two wooden beams, in a valley of sorts. Their homes are a variety of precarious, impossible structures, cobbled together out of bits of insulation, fabric, paper, cardboard, plastic containers, foam... Anything they could conceivably scavenge.

On a wooden beam or rafter in the foreground, we see the silhouettes of a small swarm of spiders crawling toward the town.

CAPTION (Impatience):

[1] I searched for a long time before I found him. Bran the Devourer. Perhaps you've heard his name.

[2] Listen closely. I'll tell you his story.

Panel Two

Push in on the mouse town. Along the main thoroughfare marches the swarm of spiders (more like a gang, really), mostly yellow sac spiders (Cheiracanthium) and domestic house spiders. They're led by a pair of giant house spiders (Eritigena Atrica), which are several times larger than the others. Mice watch in the foreground and background, from the safety of their homes or the sides of the street.

Panel Three

Push in tighter on the two leaders of the gang of spiders. They're looking around menacingly at the mice as they pass.

SPIDER LEADER #1:

[4] Quaint little town.

SPIDER LEADER #2:

[5] Terribly.

Panel Four

The spider leaders have suddenly stopped in their tracks and are holding up forelimbs to call their gang to a halt.

BALSAMIC (off-panel):

[6] That's far enough!

Panel Five

Reverse the angle to reveal that a band of mice is gathered in the street, blocking the way of the spider gang. At the forefront of this band of mice is BALSAMIC, the leader of the mouse clan. On his hind legs, his arms crossed over his puffed-up chest, he towers over the two giant house spiders. He's nearly three times their size and looks pretty badass, for a mouse.

BALSAMIC:

[7] State your business and make it quick. Your kind's not welcome round here.

RANDOM MOUSE #1:

[8] 'Cept on our dinner plates.

RANDOM MOUSE #2:

[9] Been a while since I had me some good spider meat.

PAGE THREE (5 panels)

Panel One

Pull out again so that we get a good view of the two groups in profile, face-to-face, ready for a confrontation. The spiders are smaller, but they vastly outnumber the mice. One of the spider leaders is speaking to Balsamic.

SPIDER LEADER #1:

[1] Pardon the disturbance to you and yours, but we've come looking for someone. One of our kind. Goes by the name of Impatience.

[2] She's hard to mistake. Got only six legs.

SPIDER LEADER #2:

[3] Like a graceless insect.

SPIDER LEADER #1:

[4] And them she's still got are long as summer days.

SPIDER LEADER #2:

[5] Or winter nights.

Panel Two

Push in on the two spider leaders as they continue to address Balsamic, gesturing with their forelimbs.

SPIDER LEADER #1:

[6] She's a stranger to this house and its ways, been stirring up trouble…

[7] Filling spiders' heads with queer ideas liable to attract the wrong sort of attention. Not just to our kind but to all vermin.

SPIDER LEADER #2:

[8] Yourselves included.

Panel Three

Amused, Balsamic turns his head to address his band of mice, who are laughing. One of the mice is rubbing his stomach.

BALSAMIC:

[9] Any of you boys been harboring a fugitive I don't know about?

RANDOM MOUSE #1 (rubbing his stomach):

[10] I been harboring a fugitive spider right here a few days. Her friends are welcome to follow her down and take a look!

Panel Four

The larger of the spider leaders is rearing up to stand nearly as tall as a mouse as she jabs Balsamic in the chest with one of her limbs in a condescending way, as a person might poke another person in the chest with one finger. Balsamic looks surprised and taken aback.

SPIDER LEADER #1:

[11] You may think this is funny, mammal, but we have orders straight from the Ancients themselves. They want this spider dead.

[12] They say she's fixing to kill a human. Been trying to recruit vermin to her cause.

[13] Even if she don't succeed--

SPIDER LEADER #2:

[14] She won't.

SPIDER LEADER #1:

[15] --she'll bring the wrath of man down on us all if we don't find her first.

Panel Five

Balsamic gnashes his razor-sharp teeth in the face of the spider leader, who recoils, startled.

BALSAMIC:

[16] Well she ain't here!

PAGE FOUR (5 panels)

Panel One

The spiders are incensed, bristling with anger, their hairs standing on end, fangs pulsing. Still, they are beginning to pull back, warily. Balsamic towers over the two leaders, who are backing away.

BALSAMIC:

[1] And if you touch me again, I'll relieve your body of the offending limb.

[2] Now, best you all be getting on the road to find your little six-legged fugitive. Don't wanna disappoint the Ancients now.

SPIDER LEADER #1:

[3] Yeah. We were just leavin'.

SPIDER LEADER #2 (small font):

[4] Lawless stinking mammals.

Panel Two

Balsamic shouts after the retreating spiders.

BALSAMIC:

[5] And if you folks ever plan to visit again, make arrangements for a permanent stay!

Panel Three

Pull out a fair distance as the spiders are in full retreat, marching back the way they came, and the mice continue to stand in the middle of the thoroughfare, looking tough, spitting on the ground and the like.

Panel Four

Begin to push in on Balsamic. While the other mice continue to pose, Balsamic is slumped a bit now, letting out the tough-guy act he had put on for the spiders. He looks tired, weary. He stares off into the distance.

Panel Five

Push in tight on Balsamic as he watches the spiders go, frowning now, his brow furrowed with concern.

CAPTION (OLIVE):

[6] “But what did they want?”

PAGE FIVE (5 panels)

Panel One

Exterior shot of a cozy-looking mouse home built primarily from old toilet paper rolls and a milk carton. It's the break of dawn, and light is seeping into the attic through the cracks in the walls.

BALSAMIC (from inside):

[1] Nothing we need be worrying over, dear. Spider business is spider business. They got some nerve trying to make it ours.

Panel Two

Establishing shot inside the mouse home, with Balsamic and his family (OLIVE, BRAN, and RAISIN) eating dinner at a makeshift table that is really an old, overturned mouse trap with pushpins for legs. The mice sit perched on bottle-cap chairs. Their meal is comprised of various scavenged food scraps, but the meal looks skimpy, like they're really scraping the bottom of the barrel.

Olive is addressing her husband, Balsamic, a look of concern on her face, while Balsamic affects a sense of calm control. Meanwhile, Bran sits slumped on his chair, arms crossed over his chest as he pouts, and his sister, Raisin, eats contentedly.

OLIVE:

[2] But Almond's husband, Basil, told her that the Ancients sent them.

BALSAMIC:

[3] Basil, that tail-chewer!

[4] Well… Spider Ancients, sure. They might have. But even if they did, our Ancients abandoned us long ago. Mice don't owe the Ancients a damn thing.

Panel Three

Push in on Balsamic as he scratches his head, looking thoughtful.

BALSAMIC:

[5] Besides, we've got more important things to worry about than some trouble-making spider. The clan hasn't had a good haul in weeks and the stocks are running low.

[6] Tomorrow night's outfit'll make a kitchen run. Now that the new humans have settled in, should be the cabinets are stocked.

Panel Four

Olive addresses Bran now, who is continuing to pout and hasn't touched his food.

OLIVE:

[7] Bran, dear. Is something wrong? Why aren’t you eating?

Panel Five

Push in on Bran as he shoves his food away.

BRAN:

[8] I’m not hungry.

PAGE SIX (6 panels)

Panel One

Balsamic glares angrily at his son while Olive places a calming paw on his shoulder.

BALSAMIC:

[1] If you don't want it, boy, there's plenty of mice would give up a good paw to eat your share.

Panel Two

Raisin is giggling and pointing at Bran while he looks suddenly embarrassed, his fur standing on end.

RAISIN:

[2] He’s just grumpy cause he’s in love with Penne, and Penne’s hooking up with Tarragon, and he doesn’t stand a chance cause he hasn’t even left the nest yet…

Panel Three

Olive has grabbed Raisin by the ear and is pulling her up out of her chair. Raisin winces.

RAISIN:

[3] …and Tarragon is already on the scouting rotation, and everyone knows that Bran wets his burrow, and--

[4] Ow!

OLIVE:

[5] Come along, Raisin. Time for bed.

Panel Four

Pull out so that Olive is leading Raisin away from the table in the foreground while Balsamic and Bran continue to sit across from each other at the table in the background, staring at one another (or flip the background and foreground as you see fit).

Panel Five

Push in on the pair. Balsamic leans one elbow on the table, gesturing with his paw toward his son. Bran continues to glare at his father.

BALSAMIC:

[6] Speak your mind, boy.

BRAN:

[7] All of the mice my age have been going out on missions for over a season. I'm the only one who's not allowed.

Panel Six

Focus on Bran, who is looking down at the table now, somewhat bashfully.

BRAN:

[8] I know it's selfish, but if I'm not allowed to go, how can I ever…

[9] …I just want to do my part.

PAGE SEVEN (6 panels)

Panel One

Balsamic gives his son a sympathetic look as he explains certain 'facts of life'.

BALSAMIC:

[1] You know why you've been kept in the nest. If you're too small to keep up, you'll just hold the others back and put your clanmates in danger.

[2] And the clan is more important than any one mouse.

Panel Two

Bran deflates, slumping with absolute defeat and looking completely dejected.

BALSAMIC (off-panel):

[3] More important than you and what you want…

Panel Three

Balsamic frowns at his son.

BALSAMIC:

[4] But also more important than me and what I want.

[5] You and Raisin are both the last of your respective litters. You've no idea how precious you are, to me and your mother.

Panel Four

Pull out so that we see the pair in profile. I'm guessing you'll need a page-width panel for this one. Balsamic looks at his son with a sincere and caring expression while Bran looks up gratefully at his father.

BALSAMIC:

[6] And that's why it's been so hard… So hard to see I'm the one's been selfish.

[7] I've been sheltering you too long. For the good of the clan, you need to pull your own weight.

Panel Five

Balsamic has gotten up from his chair, smiling gently at his son. Bran smiles back, eyes wide with joy.

BALSAMIC:

[8] On the night of the expedition, I can't treat you any different from the others.

BRAN:

[9] I know.

Panel Six

Having dropped to all-fours, Balsamic is leaving the table, where Bran still sits, beaming.

BALSAMIC:

[10] Good. Then eat up.

[11] You'll need the energy.

PAGE EIGHT (6 panels)

Panel One

Exterior of the (human) house at night, focusing on the roof of the home (where the mice shall be preparing to make their expedition down to the main floor).

OLIVE (from inside):

[1] If my eyes and ears were what they once were, I'd be right there with you. I don't know how your father still manages.

[2] It feels like so long since I last saw the world beyond this place. I'm so excited for you, Bran! To see it for the first time…

Panel Two

Establishing shot in the main thoroughfare of the mouse town where a band of mice, including Bran, Raisin, PENNE, and TARRAGON prepare to leave on an expedition. The mice have makeshift satchels made of scrap cloth tied to their backs. Bran can be seen with Raisin and Olive. Balsamic is talking to a group of older mice.

OLIVE:

[3] But you have to promise you'll be careful!

[4] Basil came back from a scouting trip the other day. Said he saw signs of a cat living in the house.

Panel Three

Push in on Bran, Raisin, and Olive. Bran's mother and sister have come to see him off, and Olive is fussing with Bran's satchel while Raisin watches, giggling.

OLIVE:

[5] Hasn't been a cat in this house in living memory, so could just be Basil being Basil, but you still oughta be careful.

BRAN:

[6] I ain't afraid of no cat, Mom.

Panel Four

Olive places her paws on Bran's shoulders, looking stern.

OLIVE:

[7] Then you're a damn fool. Do you know how your father got his scars?

[8] Long ago, long before you were born, your father did something real stupid. He went out beyond the house. Alone. Got it in his head to be some kinda hero.

[9] He was lucky the cat only decided to toy with him a bit.

BRAN:

[10] I know, Mom.

Panel Five

Olive kisses Bran on the forehead as Bran cringes with embarrassment.

OLIVE:

[11] I know you know. Love you, Bran. So much.

BRAN:

[12] Ugh! Mom!

Panel Six

The trio turns to a voice off-panel. Bran looks embarrassed, while Raisin gives him a pitying look, and Olive wears an unaffected smile.

PENNE (off-panel):

[13] Bran, darling! You comin', or what?

PAGE NINE (6 panels)

Panel One

Penne and Tarragon approach, holding hands.

TARRAGON:

[1] Better listen to the lady and hurry, dude. Party's leaving.

Panel Two

Bran pulls away from his mother, still looking embarrassed. Olive is pushing him along now.

OLIVE:

[2] Go! Join your friends!

Panel Three

Bran waves over his shoulder at his mother and sister, who wave back.

Panel Four

Bran is walking with Penne and Tarragon now. Tarragon has draped his free arm over Bran's shoulder, and Penne is grinning at them both.

TARRAGON:

[3] Penne says she's nervous, but we'll look out for her. Won't we, buddy?

PENNE:

[4] He's lying. Tarragon's the one's nervous. You should have seen him earlier. Trembling like a blade of grass in a cold wind.

Panel Five

The three young mice join the band of mice led by Balsamic, which is already on the march.

PENNE:

[5] All right, so maybe I am a little nervous, but I ain't letting this turn into some kinda boys club. You two don't get to have all the fun without me.

TARRAGON:

[6] By that she means she wants to make sure we don't have any fun at all.

Panel Six

Pull out as the band of mice leaves the town (the kids still goofing off), while high above, in the foreground, the silhouette of Impatience watches them go.

PENNE (small font – in the distance):

[7] Oh, shut your snout! Tell him to shut his snout, Bran!

TARRAGON (small font):

[8] Hahaha!

PENNE (small font):

[9] Tell him!

PAGE TEN (9 panels)

Panel One

An anonymous mouse is peeking out from a hole in the molding of a wall to check if the way is clear.

Panel Two

The mice are emerging en masse from the hole in the wall, Balsamic in the lead, front-and-center, looking about. Tarragon and Penne are there, holding paws.

Panel Three

Bran emerges from the hole last, out of breath. The others are already gone.

BRAN:

[1] Guys, wait up!

Panel Four

Bran is walking down a hallway, alone and looking frightened.

BRAN:

[2] Guys?

Panel Five

Bran has paused mid-step, looking over his shoulder, thinking he's heard something.

SFX:

[3] Skitter! Skitter! Skit--!

Panel Six

Bran is running, trying to catch up.

BRAN:

[4] Guys!? Where are you!?

Panel Seven

Bran pauses in a darkened doorway to catch his breath.

BRAN:

[5] >Gasp!<

[6] >Gasp!<

[7] >Gasp!<

Panel Eight

A pair of cat eyes appears glowing in the darkness of the doorway (the cat obviously sitting right next to Bran, watching him) as Bran continues to sit there, looking back the way he came. He's completely oblivious to the cat.

BRAN:

[8] >Gasp!<

[9] >Gasp!<

Panel Nine

Tarragon enters the panel, having come back for Bran. He's urging Bran to hurry. Bran has perked up, a look of relief on his face. The cat eyes are gone.

TARRAGON:

[10] Bran! There you are! We were looking all over for you!

[11] Come on! We found something!

PAGE ELEVEN (5 panels)

Panel One

Tarragon and Bran approach the group, which has rallied under the lower lip of a kitchen cabinet. The kitchen counters rise up around the mice like tremendous cliff faces in a tile desert.

Panel Two

They rejoin Penne, who is gesturing to a small crack under a cupboard, through which the mice are squeezing, one-by-one.

PENNE:

[1] After you, boys! Neither of you is getting to stare up my skirts.

BRAN:

[2] But you don't have skirts.

TARRAGON:

[3] Yeah, and what happened to ladies first? The age of chivalry has truly passed.

Panel Three

Pull out to reveal the scope of the kitchen, with the small band of mice under the cabinet beneath the kitchen sink, Bran climbing up into the crack. In the background, perched high on a distant kitchen counter-top (perhaps on a kitchen island), the silhouette of a cat watches them.

Panel Four

Bran has emerged first from among the trio into the cupboard, and he stares ahead with wide-eyed awe. Tarragon is behind him, helping to pull Penne up through the crack.

BRAN:

[4] Whoa.

Panel Five

Reverse angle to reveal the mice gathered around a tray of poison food pellets and a dish of water under the pipes of the kitchen sink. Balsamic is foremost among the mice, perched on the edge of the tray, arms spread wide, while several mice sniff at their discovery. There may be various cleaning products in the background.

BALSAMIC:

[5] This is it, everyone. Take what you can.

[6] Tonight, we feast.

PAGE TWELVE (7 panels)

Panel One

Bran, Penne, and Tarragon are stuffing their satchels full of food pellets (as are other mice in the background). Balsamic is pointing: giving orders. Some of the mice are lapping at the water or nibbling on the pellets.

Panel Two

Tarragon is handing a pellet to Penne, their gazes locked, loving. Bran watches them, a hurt expression on his face.

Panel Three

The mice begin to file out through the crack in the cupboard floor, being directed through by Balsamic.

Panel Four

As Bran is about to go through, his father places a paw on his shoulder, stopping him.

BALSAMIC:

[1] Wait.

Panel Five

The pair share a little father-son moment. Balsamic's snout is close to Bran's face as he speaks to his son. Bran looks dejected.

BALSAMIC:

[2] Tarragon's a fine mouse. An alpha. He may even lead this clan one day. Things will come easy to him, but they won't to you.

[3] That's what will make you strong. But strong in a different way.

[4] You know, I… Well, when I was young, I made a lot of mistakes. And I made… choices that I'm not proud of.

[5] But you're a better mouse than I ever was, Bran. And you'll prove it one day.

Panel Six

Bran frowns, unable to meet his father's sincere gaze, while Balsamic places a second paw on his son's other shoulder, grasping Bran firmly in both paws.

BALSAMIC:

[6] Penne may never love you, son. And it ain't likely that you'll ever lead this clan like your forefathers done. But you will find a purpose in this life. I know it.

[7] There's nothing in this world that I want more. Nothing.

Panel Seven

The pair are startled by squeaks of terror from outside the cupboard.

MICE (off-panel):

[8] Squeak!

[9] Squeak! Squeak!

[10] SQUEEEEEAAK!

PAGE THIRTEEN (Splash Page)

Panel One

Bran and Balsamic have emerged from the crack under the cupboard with expressions of horror, staring up at the sight of the cat -- tremendous, ferocious -- ripping a mouse to pieces. The unfortunate mouse is Tarragon. Penne is looking on in horror from nearby, screaming. The other mice are reeling and scattered.

PENNE:

[1] NOOOOOOOO!!!

PAGE FOURTEEN (6 panels)

Panel One

The mice are fleeing across the kitchen while the cat rips Tarragon apart in the background. Bran, Balsamic, and Penne are left lagging behind.

PENNE:

[1] Tarragon!

BRAN:

[2] Penne! We have to go!

Panel Two

Bran and Balsamic have grabbed Penne and are dragging her away. She tries to resist, reaching back for Tarragon, as if she could snatch him back from the cat if she could only get close enough.

PENNE:

[3] No! We have to save him!

BALSAMIC:

[4] He's beyond saving, child.

Panel Three

They rejoin the fleeing band of mice, Bran still supporting the sobbing Penne.

PENNE:

[5] We have to go back, Bran. He would have gone back for us.

Panel Four

The cat suddenly appears in the hallway ahead of the group, and they crash to a halt.

CAT:

[6] Where are you all running off to? Don't you want to play with me?

MICE:

[7] Squeak!

[8] Squeak!

[9] Squeak!

Panel Five

Push in on Bran shoving Penne into his father's arms as he begins to pull away from the group.

BRAN:

[9] You guys go ahead! I’ll distract it!

PENNE:

[10] Bran!

BALSAMIC:

[11] Son! Get back here! Don’t be stupid!

Panel Six

Bran has broken off from the group and is waving his arms and shouting.

BRAN:

[12] It’s for the good of the clan, Father! I’ll only slow you down!

[13] Hey! Over here, you ugly beast!

PAGE FIFTEEN (6 panels)

Panel One

The cat perks up, noticing Bran.

CAT:

[1] Do I have a volunteer?

Panel Two

The cat has begun to move after Bran, allowing the mice to rush past.

BRAN:

[2] Yeah! That’s right! I’ll play with you!

[3] Tasty mouse treat! This way!

CAT:

[4] Well, I do like your eagerness.

Panel Three

Balsamic and Penne stare in horror, both frozen in place. Tears are welling in Balsamic's eyes.

PENNE:

[5] There has to be something we can do!

BALSAMIC:

[6] There's… there's nothing. The clan is more important than any one mouse.

[7] We have to leave him.

Panel Four

Balsamic begins to guide Penne away in the direction of the group (now staring ahead with determination, refusing to look back at his son) while Penne looks over her shoulder at Bran, in shock and not resisting now.

BALSAMIC:

[8] Come on, child. Don’t look back.

PENNE:

[9] Bran…

Panel Five

A tight shot of Bran watching the group get away, a look of sad resolve on his face.

CAT (off-panel):

[10] Looks like your friends have decided to give us some privacy, little mouse. How thoughtful.

Panel Six

Pull out as the cat stalks slowly toward Bran.

CAT:

[11] I think we'll have quite a bit of fun together. Don't you?

PAGE SIXTEEN (6 panels)

Panel One

Establishing shot as the band of mice slumps into the mouse town and the mice who stayed behind are gathering to receive them.

Panel Two

Olive spots and calls out to Balsamic, who is at the head of the group, a dejected Penne at his side.

OLIVE:

[1] Balsamic!

Panel Three

Olive looks at Balsamic and Penne, concern on her face.

OLIVE:

[2] Wait… Where’s Bran?

Panel Four

Balsamic places his paws on Olive's shoulders as he explains what happened, a look of horror on Olive's face as she receives the news.

BALSAMIC:

[3] I’m sorry. I couldn’t… There was nothing I could do…

OLIVE:

[4] No…

Panel Five

Olive breaks down in tears in Balsamic's arms.

Panel Six

Pull out as the other mice unpack the satchels of food pellets in the foreground (ahem, foreshadowing, ahem). In the background, Balsamic continues to comfort Olive, and Penne sits on the ground slightly apart from the rest, staring off into space.

PAGE SEVENTEEN (6 panels)

Panel One

The cat's face is seen through the end of a paper towel roll, one eye pressed to the hole. Basically, we see the side of the cat's face and one eye framed in a circle.

CAT:

[1] Peek-a-boo!

Panel Two

The cat's face has vanished, and the light now flooding the roll's interior reveals that Bran is hiding inside, huddled up and shivering with fear.

Panel Three

A paw suddenly bursts through the end of the roll, claws extended. Bran is on his back, trying to get away.

BRAN:

[2] Ah!

Panel Four

The paw is gone, and Bran is moving back toward the center of the roll.

Panel Five

Pull out to a long, high-angle establishing shot. We see the paper towel roll on the floor of the kitchen, lengths of paper towel strewn across the room. The cat is stalking around the roll, staring at it. Above, in the foreground, Impatience is lowering herself by a guy-line toward the ground.

CAT:

[3] This is becoming tiresome, little mouse. You're supposed to keep me entertained.

[4] Do you understand? I said…

Panel Six

Push in. Finally growing impatient with the game, the cat smacks the paper towel roll spinning across the room.

CAT:

[5] Entertain me!

PAGE EIGHTEEN (5 panels)

Panel One

The roll slams into the side of a cupboard and Bran tumbles out of the end of the roll.

SFX:

[1] Thump!

BRAN:

[2] Oof!

Panel Two

The cat is stalking toward Bran, who is picking himself up from the kitchen floor.

CAT:

[3] Game over, little mouse. I think I'll eat you now.

[4] Maybe I'll swallow you whole. I think I'd like to feel you still wriggling inside me. If you'd like, I could--

Panel Three

Push in on the cat, looking confused.

Panel Four

Reverse angle. A large wolf spider (GALLOP/SCUTTLE) is standing between Bran and the cat, its forelimbs raised menacingly. Behind Bran, unbeknownst to him, Impatience is lowering herself toward the young mouse.

CAT:

[5] Who're you?

Panel Five

Pull out. The cat trips over itself as the wolf spider darts between its legs.

GALLOP/SCUTTLE:

[6] A new playmate!

PAGE NINETEEN (5 panels)

Panel One

Bran is startled when Impatience appears dangling in front of his face.

IMPATIENCE:

[1] Whilst my friend distracts that sadistic beast, shall we make our escape?

Panel Two

Impatience is on the floor now, gesturing for Bran to follow her.

BRAN:

[2] Who're you?

IMPATIENCE:

[3] An ally in the struggle. My name's Impatience. If you'll follow me…

[4] Quickly, now! Before it grows bored and remembers you.

Panel Three

Bran and Impatience are leaving the kitchen, while Bran glances over his shoulder at the cat still chasing the wolf spider in the background.

BRAN:

[5] Wait! Where are we going?

IMPATIENCE:

[6] Someplace safe to pass the day. The dawn is upon us and the humans will be stirring any minute now. Tomorrow night, I can return you home.

Panel Four

Bran and Impatience are outside in the backyard now, walking between towering grass stalks while Bran looks up at the sky in wonder. It's nearly daybreak.

BRAN:

[7] Why are you helping me?

IMPATIENCE:

[8] Because we're the same. We're both vermin. Both of us wretched things. And for too long, we wretched things have been divided.

Panel Five

Impatience and Bran reach a rusty old overturned pail full of holes. It looks like an ancient ruin, the kind of place that would be haunted. Bran looks at it fearfully. A low-hanging fog surrounds the place, blood-red from the dawn.

IMPATIENCE:

[9] Ah! Here we are. My temporary home.

BRAN:

[10] It's… lovely.

IMPATIENCE:

[11] Isn't it, though?

PAGE TWENTY (6 panels)

Panel One

A line of ants marches up an anthill under the blazing light of the afternoon sun, carrying salvage.

Panel Two

To indicate the passage of time, the ants are still marching, but under a full moon now. Perhaps include something grim amongst their salvage this time; like one of Tarragon's severed arms.

CAPTION (IMPATIENCE):

[1] “Time to wake up, Bran. Time to go home.”

CAPTION (BRAN):

[2] “I don’t recall telling you my name.”

Panel Three

Bran pokes his head out of a rusty hole in the side of the pail while Impatience, who has already exited the hideout, is perched on a stalk of grass next to the pail. Bran is glaring at her.

IMPATIENCE:

[3] Didn’t you?

BRAN:

[4] I guess I must have.

Panel Four

Bran is outside the pail now, brushing cobwebs off. Impatience is watching him with curiosity.

IMPATIENCE:

[5] So tell me, Bran. Why would a young mouse like yourself, with its whole life ahead of it, choose to sacrifice that life for its clan?

BRAN:

[6] I don’t expect you’d understand, being a spider and all.

IMPATIENCE:

[7] Try me.

Panel Five

Impatience and Bran are staring up at a crack in the mortar of one of the house's brick walls by which they can enter.

BRAN:

[8] Well, I guess… I guess cause I’m the least valuable member of the clan. And the clan is more important than any one mouse.

PAGES TWENTY-ONE (4 panels)

Panel One

Impatience and Bran chat as they climb through the interior of a wall in the house, Bran scurrying up a length of electrical cable while Impatience climbs the wall itself. The wall is like a vertically-oriented cavern, with rusty nails and splinters for stalactites and stalagmites. Light seeps in through nail-sized holes and cracks in the wood.

IMPATIENCE:

[1] A noble philosophy. But if the clan is more important than any one mouse, why should your relative value make any difference?

[2] Aren’t all mice equal in such an equation?

BRAN:

[3] All mice are equal. But I’m…

IMPATIENCE:

[4] The exception?

Panel Two

Impatience and Bran enter the mouse town through the front 'gate' cobbled together out of scavenged paper-clips, thread, cardboard, etc.

IMPATIENCE:

[5] Regardless, the whole system seems flawed to me. You say you have less value than the other mice, and yet your willingness to give yourself for them…

[6] …does that not prove your life to be of greater value than theirs? They who did not sacrifice themselves for the clan as you did.

Panel Three

Push in on Bran as he looks ahead, an expression of incomprehension on his face.

BRAN:

[7] I don’t think you understand. Any one of them would hav--

Panel Four

Push in tighter on Bran's tear-filled eyes, wide with realization.

TWENTY-TWO / TWENTY THREE (Full Spread – 5 panels)

Panel One (Full Spread with Bleed)

A wide shot of the mouse town. The desiccated corpses of mice are sprawled about the street. They've shriveled up into taut sacks of bone. Those that still have eyes stare out at nothing, their mouths frozen open in silent screams. Half-chewed pellets and green crumbs are everywhere. In the distant background, Bran stands next to Impatience, staring.

Panel Two (Left-Page Inset)

We pan across the horror that Bran is seeing to glimpse Bran's family home in the background.

CAPTION (IMPATIENCE):

[1] And so the story repeated itself…

Panel Three (Left-Page Inset)

Push in on the home.

CAPTION (IMPATIENCE):

[2] …but this time, with one essential difference.

Panel Four (Right-Page Inset)

Push in on the dark circle of the paper towel roll entrance to the home.

CAPTION (IMPATIENCE):

[3] This time…

Panel Five (Right-Page Inset)

We are fully immersed in the darkness of the tunnel (foreshadowing what Bran will find there next issue).

CAPTION (IMPATIENCE):

[4] …mankind would pay.

END OF ISSUE 1